City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers

April 21, 2023

Question: How many Fire Marshal positions are vacant today? Which positions? How long have we had these vacancies? How much overtime is budgeted today for this area? What is today's average number of inspections per Fire Marshal relative to the FY 2019 goal of 375? What is today's fee cost recovery rate? Can you give me a few scenarios that show greater cost recovery in this area?

Response:

Fire Marshal Vacancies

There are 2.0 FTE Fire Marshal positions vacant as of April 1st, 2023. That includes an Assistant Fire Marshal and a Fire Marshal I. Both positions have been vacant since February 2019 and June 2019 respectively. Circumstances for these vacant positions include the previous Fire Chief's retirement, a hiring freeze in FY 2020, the COVID shutdown of core government functions, focused hiring on leadership (assistant and deputy chiefs) positions, and a departmental reorganization to improve service delivery and responder safety.

Overtime Budget

There is no Fire Marshal overtime in the FY 2024 proposed budget. Overtime funding of $39,330 was added to the Fire Marshal's Office in FY 2017 to help with completing additional inspections after two Deputy Fire Marshal FTEs were eliminated in FY 2015. A part-time Deputy Fire Marshal (0.5 FTE) was added in FY 2019 by reallocating the overtime that was added in FY 2017.

Average Number of Inspections

The average number of inspections per Fire Marshal in FY 2023 is 378 with a projected year-end total amount of 460, which is equal to the number of inspections per Fire Marshal in FY 2022.

Cost Recovery

The FY 2023 appropriation for the Fire Marshal's Office is $1,566,906. The revenue posted to date is $211,000. The FY 2023 year-end projected revenue is $283,000. Based on that estimate, the current cost recovery rate is 18.1%.

Some scenarios that would increase cost recovery include:

1. Increase permit fee rates: Permit and inspection fee rates have not been adjusted since FY 2016. The department is currently researching fee rates and will provide a recommendation soon. Based on the current cost recovery rate, each 5.5% increase in overall rates would increase cost recovery by 1.0%.

2. Implement a re-inspection fee for failed inspections: There are times when multiple re-inspections occur for a single permit and single permit fee. Re-inspection fees would capture additional revenue to offset the department's additional costs.

3. Fill existing vacancies: The department's current Fire Marshals staff have other responsibilities beyond fee-funded inspections. Additional staff would increase permit inspections while the department's other priorities are being addressed.

4. Improve technology: Improved technology would reduce the time spent per inspection and allow more inspections to occur within the same amount of time. The Department along with ITS and Code Administration are working through technology configurations to provide inspectors with compliant notice of violation inspection forms along with capabilities to perform the inspections electronically. This technology improvement reduces the amount of time document the inspection, processing and issuing inspection reports, and provide electronic data inputs on violations that can be used to identify trend in violation to improve outreach efforts for trending fire code problems. These improvements are expected to be completed by the end of this calendar year.